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**PERCEPTIONS OF EQUALITY AND JUSTICE IN AFRICAN AMERICANS:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR WELL-BEING AND SUCCESS**

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

**PROFESSOR MA  
PROFESSOR GROSCUP**

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

1964 was a monumental year in legislation, and what first comes to mind for most is the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which increased access and equality for Blacks with the desegregation of public education, public facilities, increased voting rights for Blacks. Additionally, it prohibited discrimination based on race, religion, sex, among other demographic variables. While this seemed like a monumental landmark change for the better, Black Americans and their allies soon realized the Civil Rights Act did not do nearly enough for the Black community. Roughly 50 years later, a 2015 poll was administered nationwide, with perceptions of equal justice under the law as the question of interest. By a sweeping majority, 87% of Blacks said that the opportunity for justice between whites and Blacks in the United States is unequal. (Booker, 2015) This can be understood as the “myth” of equal rights rhetoric that legitimates and masks inequality. While there may be formal blackletter law barring inequality, it still may persist and hide behind the law. (Sarat, 2019) One of the most significant and disparate differences between Blacks and whites in the United States is their understanding of the extent and the consequences of racial discrimination. (Gibson, 1995) With this perceived sense of inequality comes unavoidable and undeniable effects, as perceived racism has an inevitable impact on African American’s sense of wellbeing. (Gary, 1995) In this study we will primarily be looking at mental and socioeconomic well-being, and academic or work life success. Well-being is a broad concept including physical health, which is far too over-arching to include in this study.

Perception of equality and justice in this study comes from the American Psychological Association’s definition, “the process or result of becoming aware of objects, relationships, and events by means of the senses, which includes such activities as recognizing, observing, and

discriminating,” which then allows individuals to convert this into meaningful knowledge one can act upon and form opinions with. (APA, 2020) Understanding perception can help understand the larger term of critical consciousness. Educator and philosopher Paolo Freire, well known for his work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, creates the term critical consciousness to help the oppressed think critically about inequitable social conditions present in their societies. (Freire, 1993) This term can be divided into critical reflection and critical action, though we will focus upon critical reflection for the purpose of this study. Critical analysis is a key part of critical reflection in the perception of “social inequalities, such as racial/ethnic, gendered, and socioeconomic constraints on educational and occupational opportunity.” (Diemer et al., 2017) I suggest that depending on the level of perception on equality and justice, through the awareness or observations of the variety of relationships and events in African American’s lived experiences, there will be a similar impact on the level of well-being and success that is self-reported.

### **Reality of Law**

Blackletter law, which can be understood as “the known and accepted principles of law set down and established, either in legislation or case law, and ascertainable from printed sources,” such as the Constitution and Bill of Rights. (Oxford Reference n.d.) These legal documents and their enforcement define and shape our lives and experiences, but what is the difference between blackletter law and common-sense justice? This can be understood as what the average person perceives as just, versus written law, though they often overlap. What should the relationship between commonsense justice and blackletter law be? Based on a series of studies done over the course of years, it was found that there must be a strong connection between commonsense justice and blackletter “official” law, and if there is not such a nexus between these two perspectives, the

authors suggest frightening perils for society and law, as the connection between these two perspectives of justice are vital for society. (Holmes, 1963) The link between common-sense justice and blackletter law can be understood most clearly through the work of Oliver Wendell Holmes. In his book, *The Common Law*, Holmes explains that the voice of the community, whether voiced or unconscious, has a strong influence on a judge's decision making and therefore, strongly impacts the law. Furthermore, Holmes claims that there should be direct correspondence between the feelings and demands of the community, and the law. (Holmes, 1963) Today, we can interpret this as equal representation in political arenas, equal distribution of these laws, and equal enforcement. While blackletter law may be in place to protect the civil liberties and rights of Americans, evidence overwhelmingly shows that the law is utilized much differently in how this country protects and punishes white people versus Black people.

Looking at a broad picture of this country's current situation, between COVID-19, civil unrest, and calls for racial equality, there have been glaring displays of a lack of a direct correspondence between the feelings and demands of black communities and the law. This is not new in any sense, and dates back as long as the U.S. has existed. A Pew Research Center survey found deep and dividing differences in views on racial discrimination, barriers to Black progress, and hope for future change in Black and white adults. More so than white participants, Black participants were able to correctly identify unfair treatment in various life circumstances, from police interactions, to criminal justice, to even financial pathways such as applying for loans or mortgages. Most important to this thesis is this central opinion from the Black community. Four in ten Blacks polled doubted that the U.S. will ever reach racial equality, saying it is an elusive goal. (Pew Research Center, 2016) In being more likely to identify these inequities, comes the question, what impact does that have on Black Americans?

In another example of the worrisome disconnect between commonsense justice and blackletter law, African Americans see the criminal justice system as racially biased, while many whites generally believe the system is racially neutral and as reflecting the ideals of equal treatment before the law. (Henderson, et al., 1998) A recent popular example of this can be cited in the differential treatment of wealthy, white celebrity Felicity Huffman, and the experiences of a Black homeless mother, Tanya McDowell in the U.S. court system. In the case of Huffman, she was sentenced to 14 days in prison for federal fraud charges for paying \$15,000 to an SAT administrator to doctor her daughter's scores, so she could attend a better college. (Taylor, 2020) McDowell, who was homeless at the time in Bridgeport, listed her address as her babysitter's address in a nearby suburb of Norwalk so that her 6-year-old son could attend a better school. For this, McDowell was sentenced to 5 years in prison on felony larceny charges. (Tepfer, 2012) While these cases garnered national attention, research shows that Blacks are consistently more likely than whites to perceive criminal injustice, as previously mentioned. The researchers additionally found that one mediating factor to perceptions of criminal justice and injustice is the class position of the participant in accordance with race. (Hagan et al., 1982) The impacts of class position and race are clearly seen in the differential treatment of Huffman and McDowell and such awareness is linked to negative psychological impacts for black individuals. (Compton, 2015)

While various survey data shows that there is a national increase in support for the principle of racial equality, this sentiment does not correlate into actual support for social programs to address and ameliorate racial inequality. (Bobo et al., 1993) Furthermore, institutional racism persists; for example, audit studies suggest that similarly qualified Black and white job applicants are not treated equally, with whites being more likely to get an interview or to be hired (Pager et al., 2008). Although discrimination within the housing market has been illegal through blackletter

law since the Fair Housing Act of 1968, residential segregation persists; that is, many neighborhoods across the U.S. are characterized by a high concentration of one racial/ethnic group or another. (Glaeser et al., 2012). Finally, the extent of racial inequalities in arrests and convictions translates into disproportionate representation of ethnic and racial minority groups in the criminal justice system. (Alexander, 2012)

### **Bringing the Reality of Law into the Psychological Realm**

Few social scientists would argue against the basic theory that the beliefs and behaviors of individuals are affected by the environments in which they live. It is understood in the psychological world that people learn from the social and political contexts in which they exist within, and then adjust, accommodate, and adapt to what is thought of to be the expectations, rewards, and penalties that surround the context of their lives. (Gibson, 1995) While Gibson (1995) pursues the hypothesis that community values, such as the national values of justice and equality and the realities of such, are connected to individual perceptions of political freedom, Gibson (1995) explains this may look like the willingness to express one's mind or to assert one's political preferences. Expanding upon this theory, I theorize that the national values of justice and equality, and the personal perceptions of the applicability of these values to Black Americans in general and personally, will impact mental-health, well-being, success in Black Americans. Within the impact on Black individuals, may come an "achievement gap," which I hope to show is directly correlated with issues of equality and justice, due to injustice that is visible in the American education system. As stated before, it is very well understood in the literature that on issues of racial inequities, Blacks and whites hold very different views. An important distinction to make on this issue is that according to past research, in understanding this racial inequity, Blacks are much more likely to

understand and attribute the racial gap in resources and thus achievement, to this inequity. (Sigelman et al., 1991) It is also established in the theory surrounding this topic, that Black Americans are less likely to express their political views for fear of repercussions. Following this line of thought, I would like to reasonably hypothesize that if Black Americans are impacted by perceptions of equality and justice so much as to suppress their political views, there ought to be related impacts on success and well-being, with mental health fitting in this former category. For example, as noted before, Blacks are more likely to attribute racial inequities to discrimination, while Whites are much more likely to attribute Black failings and lack of success to lack of motivation and will power. (Gibson, 1995) How do perceptions of equality and justice impact Blacks mental health, well-being, and outcomes of success?

### **Well-Being, Mental Health, and Success**

As the World Health Organization defines it, good mental health can be understood as a state of well-being in which an individual recognizes their own abilities, can cope with life's normal stressors, in which the individual can work productively and fruitfully, as well as has the means to make a contribution to their community. (WHO, 2004) With this understanding of mental health, which encompasses aspects of well-being and success, we can note a gap within this definition, that makes its application to our population of interest, Black adults, more complex. With racial inequality and barriers to full justice as a part of most Black Americans daily life experiences, we cannot categorize these experiences within the limits of life's "normal life stressors," as Black Americans unequivocally and disproportionately face these increased stressors. Inherently, within racial inequality and injustice comes discrimination, and discrimination is well-understood in the scientific and psychological field as being a large social



detriment to health, especially mental health, and is also linked to various other social detriments, such as substance abuse. (Phelan et al. 2010; Compton et al., 2015). While statistics and research can support the claim that there is incredible amounts of injustice and inequality in the United States, particularly for Black Americans, does a Black individual's perception of the amount of equality and justice in the United States impact their well-being and success?

### **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The legal world is intertwined with the social world, being a part of our lived daily experiences. The laws that define the limitations and freedoms we have in this nation are undeniably rooted into our social worlds. It vital to look at the role of the law in justice and equality as, "relationships between persons, and relationships between persons and things, constitute the subject matter of the law." (Ganong et al., 1965) It is therefore a large portion of the fabric of our society and dictates our experiences with equality and justice. The social world, which encapsulates law, has two sets of factors that can predict outcomes of well-being, which includes mental health, and success. There are risk factors that increase the likelihood of a negative well-being outcome and protective factors that increase the odds of a positive well-being. These factors can also be understood as the social determinants of mental health, with risk factors that I will take a look at being, "discrimination and social exclusion, adverse early life experiences, poor education, unemployment...job insecurity...poverty...". (Compton et al., 2015) Social determinants of mental health are all controlled by law, and public legal institutions such as the courts and Congress. These legal intermediaries all have the capacity to facilitate social change and impact equality and justice. (Talesh et al., 2019)

Engaging with the previous work of the aforementioned risk factors, I will use feelings and ratings on discrimination, social exclusion, education, community, experiences with unemployment, job security and poverty as operational measures of well-being and success. Overwhelming research has found that Blacks are neglected in these areas by legal and social institutions, causing poor mental health at an alarming and disproportionate rate. An analysis of the 2020 Census shows that for Black Americans, the poverty rate is at an all-time low. While this may sound like positive news, we must compare this figure to the non-white Hispanic rate. While the Black poverty rate is at 18.8% for 2019, the non-Hispanic white poverty rate is at a mere 7.3%. (Census, 2020) This figure shows us Blacks are about 2.5 times more likely to live in poverty.

Black and Hispanic children often find themselves in over-crowded, neglected, and under-funded schools. This is due to the low-property taxes surrounding these inner-city schools, which causes these schools to be neglected in funding. Many families in this area cannot simply afford to pay higher property taxes in their current area, and therefore are trapped in the under-funded school systems. Those with the means to move out into the suburbs, those who are already in an affluent neighborhood with well-funded schools, or those who attend private schools are overwhelmingly white. This segregation in schools leads to social exclusion, poor education, and adverse early child-hood experiences, and under-prepared adults entering the job market, compared to their white peers. (Ostrander, 2015) While Blackletter law, specifically the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka Supreme Court case ended segregation and required the integration of schools, informal law through property tax policy and education spending policy has once again allowed for the segregation of schools and the continuation of these social detriments to mental health for Black Americans.

A study by Diemer et al. (2017) measured critical consciousness in Black adolescents, which is how oppressed people think about and respond to injustice and inequality. Unclear conclusions were found surrounding the impact of levels of critical consciousness on well-being and success. On one hand, higher levels of critical reflection of socio-economic and systemic barriers may lead to increased academic engagement, motivation, and academic success by instilling in the youth hope to navigate their perception of these barriers. On the other hand, it may cause Black youth to feel hopeless and static in the wake of the awareness and their perception of systemic challenges. (Diemer et al., 2017)

In a study by Tyler et al. (2019), the researchers discuss how Black youth face structural and systemic inequalities that can either restrict or enhance their life quality, and they must navigate these risk factors in an adequate way to achieve thriving. While this study does look at well-being and youth success, it does so by also using the term thriving, meaning a high level of well-being and success. In this study, they define thriving through the use of the Five Cs model of key constructs: confidence, competence, character, caring, and connection. Confidence addresses youth's positive self-esteem and values of self-worth, while competence is defined as, "youth's ability to navigate different contexts and their perceptions of these abilities." (Tyler et al., 2019) Character refers to youth's behavioral and cognitive representations of their moral and personal values and caring is defined as the behavioral and cognitive representations of empathy and sympathy towards others. Connection had a very salient definition, being that the youth must display high levels of positive association with their school, family, community, and friends.

Most importantly, high levels of the Five C's are closely related to "hopeful futures, life satisfaction, and empowerment while being negatively associated with anxiety, depressive

symptoms, and risk behaviors.” (Tyler et al., 2019) This speaks volumes on how to structure my measures for well-being success, in that positive values of the Five C’s lead to such a result. Ultimately, the study found that the promotion and implementation of the Five Cs in the early adolescent period is vital to support critical consciousness for well-being and success, even despite systemic barriers. With critical consciousness and the Five Cs all being affected by the social policies, the legal system, and our laws themselves, perception or critical consciousness that Black individuals have, is of the upmost importance to this study.

In a study looking at Black adults in the U.S. and their experiences with racial discrimination and coping strategies, it was found that Blacks, “who reported frequent encounters with *perceived* [emphasis added] racial discrimination manifested indicators of low self-esteem,” than counterparts with few to no self-reported encounters. (Simpson et al., 1985) My definition of well-being in this study considers self-esteem as a strong construct within it. The emphasis on perceived within the Simpson et al. (1985) quote aids the reasoning and importance in my question of interest. These encounters may or may not have been racially discriminative or could be viewed as having different levels of harm on an individual level. I hypothesize that the perception matters in this type of research, from daily situations to large structural views of equality and justice, the impact on Black American’s well-being and success will vary. Reflecting much of the literature in this field, there is an inverse relationship between Blacks facing experiences of racial discrimination and their life satisfaction. (Utsey et al., 2000) Specifically, this study looks at the different types of assessments, or perceptions, of racist encounters, labeling them as potentially resulting in harm or a loss, a threat, irrelevant or a challenge. (Lazarus et al., 1984)

The primary researcher of this paper, Utsey, suggests changes to this theory, being that the harm/loss perception of an encounter may result in a passive action, such as withdrawal and depression. We can connect the withdrawal symptoms to negative feelings of connection to society, and paired with depression, results in low levels of well-being, perhaps trickling into low feelings of self-reported success. Utsey (2003) continues, theorizing that the threat category will be responded with coping strategies, while the challenge category will have an emotional growth response. He chooses not to acknowledge the irrelevant category as viable in his theory. In my own analysis, I see the opportunity for the emotional growth response to foster increases in well-being or success, if emotional growth is achieved. Within each of these theorized responses, we must consider if the individual on the receiving end has the resources to cope in these ways, and if not, Utsey (2003) theorizes the return to the withdrawal and depression response. If these stressors occur and go beyond the resources the individual has in their reach, it endangers their well-being and the risk of an onset of psychological disorders is eminent. (Utsey et al., 2000) Consequently, the impact and stress of existing in a society fraught with racism leads to this being one of the most-mentioned problems when Black people seek counseling. (Priest, 1991)

While statistics and research can support the claim that there is incredible amounts of injustice and inequality in the United States, particularly for Black Americans, does perception of this justice and equality in the U.S. impact how Blacks fair in well-being and success measures? Will those who rate their personal perceptions of equality and justice as high, in turn also have high levels of well-being and success? Will those who rate their personal perceptions of equality and justice as low, hence taking the stance of high levels of inequality and injustice, fair worse in their well-being and success? There is a clear gap in the current research in looking at the perception of equality and justice and the implications on self-reported well-being and success.

While perceptions of fairness in the U.S. Judicial system, perceptions of general equality, and perceptions of the racial wealth gap, among other topics, are well documented, none make the direct link to how the perceptions impact the Black community's well-being and success, instead of solely looking at the concrete societal factors. Perception matters, as it defines the way we view the world, and different perceptions of the same experience may vastly change life outcomes.

Zimmerman (1999) chooses to subvert the usual path in the field of the mental health of black Americans that usually focuses on risk factors, problematic behavior, and consequences. Instead, these researchers choose to study one factor they theorize may help Black adolescents avoid negative outcomes such as poor-mental health or poor life outcomes. Specifically, resilience is highlighted as an important factor in avoiding negative outcomes. In a perspective in which resilience is considered, it can be defined as a factor that is determined by both context-specific environmental factors and individual factors. Individual differences in responding to environmental stressors [systemic racism] can influence how they may adapt and overcome these circumstances. (Rutter, 1993) These individual differences can vary by socio-economic status, gender, or perception of circumstances, among others. Persistent exposure to, and I argue personal perception of, racism, limited educational and career opportunities, or poverty can increase sentiments of helplessness, which is well recognized in the field of psychology as impacting Black communities. (Seligman et al., 1986) I theorize that perception of equality and justice will impact feelings of helplessness, which contribute to poor well-being and success. Those who report high levels of feeling helpless also report depression, low self-esteem, and anxiety, all factors that deteriorate well-being and success. (Seligman et al., 1986)

Leading me towards a possible direction in predicted results due to the results of this study, Anderson (1990) found that most Black youth do grow up to be, “well-functioning and productive adults.” Which can be translated in terms of this study, as rating well-being more positively and a successful Black population. In the aforementioned study, Zimmerman (1999) focuses on the term sociopolitical control to “refer to beliefs that actions in the social and political system can lead to desired outcomes.” We can understand this as experiences within the social and political realms of everyday life, as well as feelings of critical consciousness, or perceptions of equality and justice. Zimmerman (1999) attributes feelings of high sociopolitical control to increased self-esteem, confidence, and positively responding to challenges in other arenas of their lives, which can combat feelings of helplessness.

Williams (1994) states the importance of work such as my study, saying “the study of the relationship between political control and health status among members of minority groups is needed.” To clarify the term political control, it relates to the agency and perceptions of political systems in the United States. Similar to my hypothesis, Zimmerman (1999) and fellow researchers hypothesize that “perceived sociopolitical control will reduce the negative consequences... on mental health outcomes” To reiterate my hypothesis, I theorize greater perceptions of current or future equality and justice will lead to better wellbeing (i.e. mental health) and successful futures. On the contrary, this study also provided evidence suggesting that though Black youth may feel personally helpless, they are able to avoid outcomes concerning negative well-being. As theorized, the researchers found that high levels of sociopolitical control reduced the relationship between feelings of helplessness and negative psychological symptoms. On the flip side, deleterious psychological symptoms came hand-in-hand with helplessness with below-average feelings of sociopolitical control. (Zimmerman et al., 1999)

Most critical to this study is the idea that the mental health of Black youth is dependent on individual factors and social environment, as mentioned before. Myers (1989) suggests that youths' mental health problems, which is part of their well-being, “are adaptive problems rather than intrinsically pathological.” Feelings and perceptions are widely adaptive, and are heavily related to increasing mental health, well-being, and success. Taylor (1988) theorizes that *perception* [emphasis added] and belief in one’s ability in the word, can be dramatically helpful in engaging positive outcomes. Perception of equality and justice, in this study, truly stands as the key role in well-being and success. Zimmerman and colleagues reiterate this by saying, “Our results provide additional evidence that *perceived* [emphasis added] control may act as a protective factor against risks associated with psychological distress.” (Zimmerman et al., 1999) Solidifying this viewpoint, Taylor et al., (1998) suggesting that perceptions are just as crucial to mental health, and thus wellbeing, as actual control is.

### **Chapter 3: Study Overview & Hypothesis**

This study will examine Black people’s perceptions of legal equality and justice in the United States and equality of justice based off their personal experiences and perception. Then, this study will examine their psychological and social well-being, as well as their success attainment. The sample will be taken from a wide variety of Black Americans across the country. All participants will complete a written self-report on perceptions of legal equality/justice and self-report on equality and justice based on life experiences. For the purpose of this study, we will split the group based on initial perceptions of equality and justice in a legal regard, and personal regard, to complete the second battery of tests. One group will be those who have high perceptions of equality and justice in regard to their personal racial experiences, and who have high perceptions



of legal equality and justice. The second set of groups contain those who reported low perceptions of equality and justice due to these aforementioned personal experiences, and who report low perceptions of legal equality and justice. This will not impact any difference in treatment but will be used to provide the research assistant a more manageable small group. I expect each set of groups to share individuals who score both as high or low, on both legal and personal perceptions. For the purpose of the relationship between legal perception and personal perception, those who diverge from the high-high and low-low rating of both measures will be excused from this study, though that divergence makes for a very interesting direction for future research. The participants of the study will then complete written self-report scales on self-esteem, well-being, race related stress, perceived inequality in their youth, depression and hopelessness, as well as demographic information questions regarding income, education level, employment status, etc.

The majority of literature in this field suggests that those who experienced higher levels of racial trauma report higher levels of stress, depression, and lower self-esteem, which then impacts functioning and success. Thus, I predict that the individuals who report perceptions of lower levels of legal equality and justice and lower levels of equality and justice in personal experiences, will be negatively impacted and report low measures of well-being and report hinderances to success. Part of the literature in this research field focuses on the importance of positive perception and empowerment in Black wellbeing and successful outcomes. That being so, secondly, I hypothesize that those who perceive high levels of equality and justice, and report high levels of equality and justice in their personal experiences will report higher measures of well-being and less hinderances to success. Both hypotheses represent positive correlations between both variables.

## **Chapter 4: Proposed Method**

### **Participants**

This study will include black Americans ages 18 and above, of all socio-economic statuses, gender identities, etc. The only restrictions to qualification for the study is having sufficient mental competence to properly consent to participation, as well as access to the internet. The sample will be pooled from a nationwide ad campaign using social media, outreach through community centers across the U.S., peer snowballing for participants, and outreach to high-schools for those ages 18 and above, community colleges, and 4-year colleges. A power analysis was conducted for sample size estimation, based on the statistical table by Cohen (1992). With a power of .80,  $\alpha = .05$  and a medium effect size, the proposed sample size needed for this effect size is 128 participants, with 64 in the high perception and 64 in the low perception group. I propose gathering about 500 responses nationwide, and randomly selecting 128 for use in the study to avoid internal bias or clustering of a certain demographic or region of the U.S. due to distribution. Participants will be briefed before signing the consent form on the nature of the study, perceptions of legal equality and justice and personal perceptions. They will also receive a briefing and content warning of racially sensitive topics, and tests measuring mental health, well-being, and success, with consent to divulge demographic personal information to the study. Participation is voluntary and consent can be withdrawn at any time, with the promise of secure, anonymous storage of the data and the option to have the data deleted if the participant withdraws. If they consent to participate, they must answer every question, or can withdraw with no penalty. They will all still receive

compensation. Participants will be compensated for their time, which will be at most two hours, with a \$50 electronically sent Visa gift card to the email address provided.

### **Materials**

This study will utilize a wide variety of scales in the field of race related experiences, mental-health, well-being, enrichment in life, and a self-created scale that will measure perceptions of legal justice and equality. The first scale used is Carter's (2014) Beliefs About Inequality Index. (See Appendix Scale 1) This scale is constructed from three survey items measuring the individual's attribution of racial inequality to structural or individual factors. This will enable the analysis of whether the perception of equality is legal or due to personal experiences, more so negating these personal experiences to factors of equality and justice. The three survey questions are rated on a Likert scale of 0 to 4, 0 being strongly disagree, 2 as neutral, and 4 being strongly agree. No validity was indicated for this scale.

The second scale I will use is a variation of Diemer et al.'s (2016) Critical Consciousness Scale. (See Appendix Scale 2) Although these researchers include questions about political action, voting, protests, and such, I will be focusing on their 3 questions about egalitarianism and 4 about perceived inequality. The rest of the questions on the other topics will be removed for irrelevancy to this study. I will switch the verbiage in the egalitarianism questions to reflect current perceptions of equality instead of theoretical questions. This scale will provide data on perceptions of equality and inequality to later compare to well-being and success. These questions were measured using a 1- 4 scale, 1 being strongly disagree and 4 being strongly agree. Strong convergent validity at  $r = .73$  for the egalitarianism questions and  $r = .78$  for the perceived inequality measure. I expect some changes in convergent validity as I am changing the verbiage from "should" to "do." These changes are anticipated to be minor.

The third scale used is Marsh et al.'s (2020) Well-Being Profile, specifically the medium version the researchers created. (See Appendix Scale 3) Although there is no globally agreed upon definition of well-being, as it can be highly subjective, these researchers applied the definition of well-being to their scale as "positive mental health." (Marsh, et al., 2020) Taking into account the tedious length of the original Well-Being Profile, they created more applicable versions for other studies who needed shorter versions. They used a machine-learning algorithm to construct the 15-item format and tested this format in relation to convergent validity at  $r = .81$ . Overall, in the field of well-being, this index appears to be one of the most comprehensive and applicable measures to a wide variety of research and practice. It's focus on mental health within well-being provides me with a measure that will match much of the equality/justice versus mental well-being research reviewed previously.

The fourth scale I will use a variation of Utsey and Ponterotto's (1996) Race-Related Stress Index, which is the Utsey (1999) Brief Version of the Race-Related Stress Index. (See Appendix Scale 4) It is a 22-item measure using a Likert scale from 0-4, with untraditional responses attached to the numbers. I added a 5<sup>th</sup> response to account for those participants who may not have strong racial perceptions within their daily lives. They are measured as follows: 0 = This has never happened to me; 1 = This event happened but did not bother me; 2 = This event happened, and I was slightly upset; 3 = This event happened, and I was upset; 4 = This event happened, and I was extremely upset; 5 = This event happened to me, but not due to race. It was crucial to put this measure towards the end as Utsey (2000) noted that in his use of the index, it brought up a lot of emotion within the participants. This measure looks at a wide variety of situations and factors that go into structural and everyday racism, allowing this study to reveal important data on senses of personal equality and justice. The validity of this scale was measured at  $r = .89$ .

The fifth scale I will employ is the Angel's (2020) Enriched Life Scale (See Appendix Scale 5) which will allow me to collect data on personal feelings of life success (enrichment) and well-being. The 40-item scale is measured in the classic Likert scale. There are a five Enrichment themes the researchers focus on in this scale; Genuine relationships, sense of purpose, engaged citizenship, mental health and psychological health. For the purpose of brevity and the scope of my research, I will be removing the 6 questions of physical health, bringing the number of items to 34. This scale gives me an all-around perspective on life satisfaction and enrichment as well as well-being, which all tie into my variable of success. The validity of this measure is  $r = .82$ . The removal of 6 questions, which were scored on a different scale than the other items, complicated retrieving and analyzing data in the original study. I believe the validity will only benefit from that removal. Putting this scale after the emotional stress of the previous Race-Related Index Scale will be in hopes that the participants are able to identify enrichment in their lives, after viewing examples of the opposite. Success will be interpreted through the data collected from this index and the Well-Being Profile, but also the demographic information collected about employment, educational attainment, income, etc.

The final scale I will use is a self-created measure, Perceptions of Legal Equality Index identifying perceptions of legal equality and justice. It is a 5-item scale, measured through the classic Likert Scale 1-5. This measure was created to receive data surrounding specific perceptions towards blackletter law and common-sense law and the opinions of Black Americans. There is no current measured convergent validity for this scale.

### **Procedure**

This study will take place through Qualtrics, an online psychological survey platform. This allows for participants access from all across the U.S.. Upon pressing the link provided to them, they will read a consent form detailing the demographic information asked of participants, the estimated length, the compensation, and content warnings for race-related content. They will also be assured in this briefing that all data collected is entirely secure and anonymous, that participants can withdraw at any point in time, and still receive compensation for their time. Participants will be asked to answer every question and reminded they may withdraw if they feel uncomfortable doing so. They will be asked to not confer with anybody else while taking the survey, even if they are not a participant. By consenting, they will legally report themselves as above 18 and as having sufficient mental competence.

After consenting and debriefing, the participants will enter demographic information including race, gender, highest level of education, number of children, marital status, age, current employment status and title, income, region they are reporting from, and an email address only used to email the e-VISA card. The order of the indexes and measures used will remain the same and the questionnaire will remain untimed. They may save their progress and return to it at a different time, though it is encouraged to complete it in one sitting due to the sensitive nature of the study. After finishing the study, participants will be debriefed on the purpose of the study, the safety of their information, and the importance of the research they participated in. Mental health hotlines, warm-lines, and free mental-health community centers and community-aid nonprofits from across the nation will be provided to ease any emotional discomfort. Data will be collected through qualtrics and mean of their Likert-scores on measures for legal justice, personal justice,

well-being and success, will be recorded. Their success in terms of demographic questions asked and the Enriched life scale will be combined.

### **Ethical Concerns**

This study is of minimal risk, with most risk being accounted for with the option of free mental health and counseling services as well as resources to community-aid. The participants will not be exposed to any graphic scenarios or imagery. The benefits of this study, which will help us understand how perceptions of legal equality and personal equality intersect and impact well-being and success, outweigh harm. An Institutional Review Board proposal was submitted to the Scripps College coordinator for this study and was approved.

### **Chapter 5: Predicted Results**

This study is geared towards understanding the relationship between perceptions of equality and justice in the legal realm and equality and justice in personal experiences for Black Americans against their score on well-being and success. I am hypothesizing a relationship between both high legal perceptions of equality and high personal perceptions, thus implying high levels of well-being and success. My second hypothesis is low levels of legal and personal equality will imply and show in the data low levels of well-being and success. I do anticipate there may be an inverse relationship between reported low levels of legal and personally experienced equality, and well-being. Literature regarding resilience in Zimmerman (1999) and avoidance coping in Utsey (2000) may result in higher levels of well-being and success, though the participants may report low perceptions of legal and personal equality.

A two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) will be conducted to see whether participants with higher perception levels of legal equality or lower perceptions of legal equality fare better in well-being and success. Another two-way analysis of Variance (ANOVA) will be used to test the high perceptions of personal equality and low perceptions of personal equality and justice with well-being and success. An independent samples T-test will be used to also look at high perceptions of legal equality versus well-being/success. (Figure 1) Another will be used for lower perceptions and wellbeing/success. Two more will be used to detail the relationship between the perceptions behind personal experiences and well-being, one independent samples T-test for the high category, and one for the low category. A predicted main effect will show a positive correlation in each category. A smaller effect that is predicted is a potential inverse relationship between those who rate low levels of equality in legal and personal fields, and well-being/success. (Figure 2) Independent samples T-tests will be used to look at the interaction between perceptions of equality, legal and personal, and demographic information provided. There will be tests run on education level and income. I expect main positive effects with education level and well-being and success, as well as income, as it increases. (Figure 3 and 4)

As discussed in the literature review hopelessness is present among Black communities. A simple Pearson correlation test will be conducted to see the relationship between hopelessness and personal perceptions of equality and another correlation test on legal equality. The results of the Pearson correlation tests will indicate that there is a significant positive relationship between hopelessness and perceptions of both low legal equality and low personal equality.



## **Chapter 6: Discussion**

Due to the glaring displays of systemic racism and my own, and peer's, personal experiences with racism in everyday life and academia I found it critical to study how perception of one's legal equality, and personal daily equality coincide or differ. Additionally, this study's main objective sought out to investigate the effect of these varying perceptions on the well-being and success attainment of Black Americans. If this research does support my hypotheses that solely perception of equality in either realm can negatively impact well-being and success, then action must be taken to empower and uplift the black community through legal systems and the eradication of everyday racism. If the data supports the idea that blackletter law is useless in supporting feelings of equality and justice in the black community, much systemic barriers are further illuminated, and legislative action must be demanded, as well as community revival. Measuring racial trauma, mental health, all around well-being, and life enrichment and success will provide much needed information on our Black American communities and how personal perception may change their outlook on the world, and thus their paths.

### **Limitations**

Limitations include extraneous variables that went undetected, such as reading comprehension or awareness of the law. These very well could have been confounding variables, but testing for reading comprehension is classist, echoes the reading comprehension exams Blacks had to take to vote in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and is personally insulting to ask of the participants. Knowledge of the law could have been controlled, but again is classist and skews the participants to more civically engaged, critically conscious, or highly educated people, which alters the accessibility of the study to a wide variety of Black Americans. Demand characteristics or social

desirability could also play a role in the responses, if the participants felt the need to respond differently because they are in a research study. I must acknowledge the potential for research bias, as this is a topic very personal to me. I took all measures to be un-biased and remain objective in the creation of this study. Another concern is that the data is all self-report and does not include any manipulation tasks or checks.

On a more theoretical note, conformity to group beliefs or American propaganda that surround Black children is a process that unfolds through childhood, and unlearning this conformity leads well into adult hood. It may be difficult to discern where in this process the participants may be, as the expressed view may be a learned opinion of conformity, or if the participant has been able to explore their own opinions and perceptions in an unbiased manor. Age may be a factor in noting where a participant may be in this process. This is also not unique to Black communities; every individual suffers through the process of conformity and individuality throughout their lifetime.

### **Conclusion**

There is an important caveat that must be considered when this research is completed. As minority people are “ghettoized” (neglected by the government, over-policed, etc.) Finifter (1974) argues that “they may become less sensitive to the dominant values of the community.” Therefore, he argues, segregation in the “ghettos” or highly-POC areas may enhance perceptions of freedom and less racial discrimination, though it does not exist outside this bubble. Those who are in this bubble can find spheres of political freedom even in these extremely oppressive environments. (Durand et al., 1976) This allows us to hope for higher levels of well-being in these communities, and the perception of equality necessary for success.

Ultimately, this study has provided a framework for research on perceptions of legal equality and justice, perceptions of lived equality and justice, and the effects on Black American's well-being and success. This study offers an alternative approach to the study of well-being and success of Black Individuals, by bringing the importance of personal perception into the field. This centers their perspective and their voices, and future research should continue to. We can expect to find a negative impact on the well-being of Black individuals due to systemic racism and overall low ratings of legal and personal equality. This highlights the need for comprehensive legislation that connects common-sense justice, the voices of the oppressed, to the written, indisputable strength of black letter law. Future research should delve deeper into the wide variety of variables I employed and must maintain the pressure on fighting for true legal equality and the end of systemic racism, while centering Black voices. Different approaches should be used in future research, such as having participants list general negative social experiences that they have had and then take a scale on the presence of racial discrimination. Another model can expose participants to true black letter law and subsequently, collected data on opinions of equality and justice based on the fine print of the law. This research is vital to empower and uplift Black Americans in the quest for their true equality, justice, well-being, and success.

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Figure 1



Figure 2

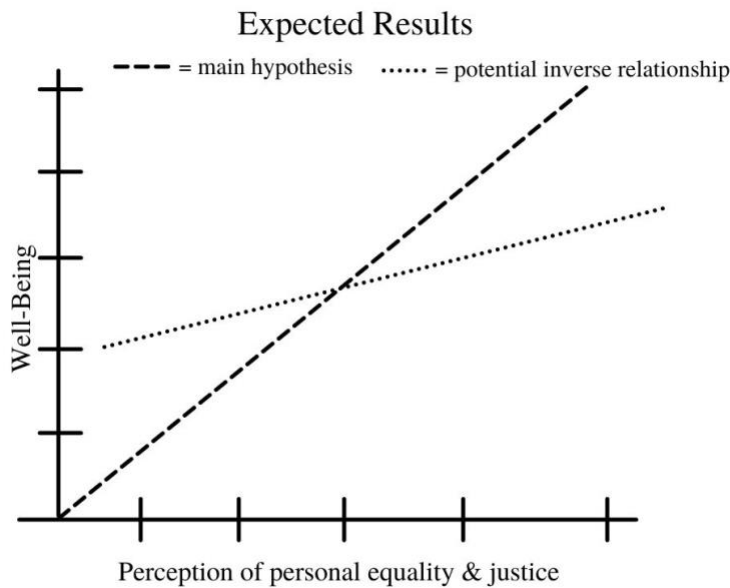


Figure 3

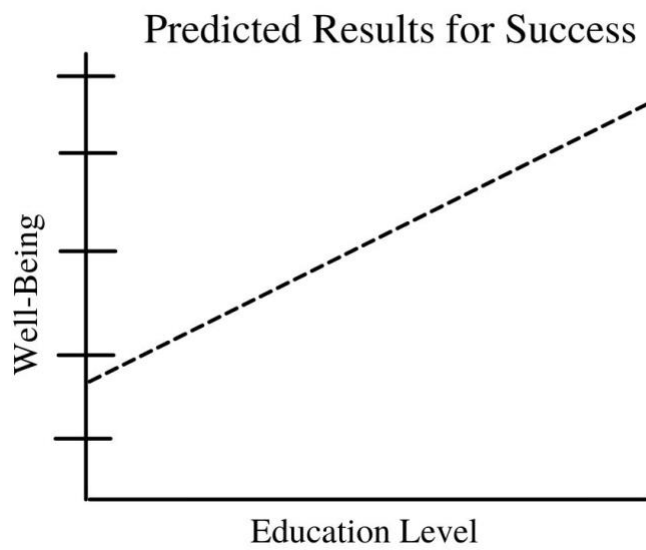
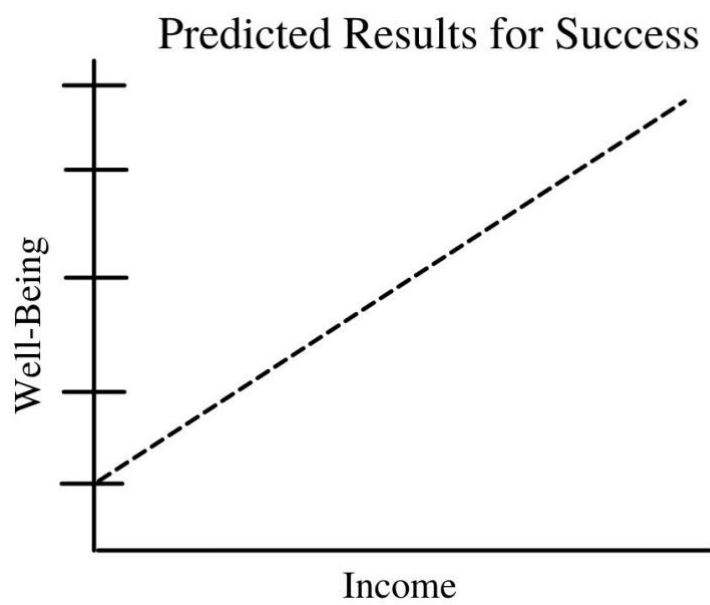


Figure 4



## **Appendix A**

### **Scale 1**

#### **Beliefs About Inequality Index**

Measured on a Likert Scale 0 being strongly disagree to 4 being strongly agree.

- (1) “If Blacks tried harder, they would do as well as whites”
- (2) “Blacks have gotten less than they deserve over the past few years.”
- (3) “Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way up.”

## **Appendix B**

### **Scale 2**

#### **Critical Consciousness Scale**

Measured on a Likert Scale 1 being strongly disagree to 5 being strongly agree.

Critical reflection: Egalitarianism/Equality

1. All ethnic and racial groups do have equal chances at education.
2. All ethnic and racial groups do have equal chances at jobs.
3. Schools do teach students to respect members of all ethnic and racial groups.

Critical reflection: Perceived Inequality

1. Children who are members of certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer chances than other children to get a good high school education in this country.
2. Children from poor families have fewer chances than others to get a good high school education in this country.
3. Adults who are members of certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer chances than others to get good jobs in this country

## **Appendix C**

**Scale 3**

**WB-Pro 15**

Measured using a scale of 1-9. 1 being strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 5 being neither agree or disagree, and 9 being strongly agree.

1. I can admit my shortcomings without shame or embarrassment.
2. I generally have a lot of energy.
3. Most of the time I am really interested in what I am doing.
4. I easily get caught up in other people's feelings.
5. I feel very optimistic about my future.
6. I do not get easily upset.
7. I quickly get over and recover from significant life difficulties.
8. My life has a clear sense of purpose.
9. I feel free to make my own choices.
10. I feel that I'm a person of worth.
11. I willingly give of my time to others in need.
12. Most things I do, I do well.
13. I am easily able to concentrate when necessary.
14. All things considered, I would describe myself as a happy person.
15. There are people in my life who really care about me.

**Appendix D**

**Scale 4**

**Race-Related Stress Index**

6-point Likert score (0 = This has never happened to me; 1 = This event happened but did not bother me; 2 = This event happened, and I was slightly upset; 3 = This event happened, and I was upset; 4 = This event happened and I was extremely upset); 5 = This event happened but I do not believe it was due to race.

## EQUALITY AND JUSTICE: IMPLICATIONS FOR WELL-BEING AND SUCCESS

1. You notice that crimes committed by White people tend to be romanticized, whereas the same crime committed by a Black person is portrayed as savagery, and the Black person who committed it, as an animal.
2. Salespeople/clerks did not say thank you or show other forms of courtesy and respect (e.g., put your things in a bag) when you shopped at some White/ non-Black owned businesses.
3. You notice that when Black people are killed by the police, the media informs the public of the victim's criminal record or negative information in their background, suggesting they got what they deserved.
4. You have been threatened with physical violence by an individual or group of White/non-Blacks
5. You have observed that White kids who commit violent crimes are portrayed as "boys being boys," while Black kids who commit similar crimes are wild animals.
6. You seldom hear or read anything positive about Black people on radio, TV, in newspapers, or history books.
7. While shopping at a store the salesclerk assumed that you couldn't afford certain items (e.g., you were directed toward the items on sale).
8. You were the victim of a crime and the police treated you as if you should just accept it as part of being Black.
9. You were treated with less respect and courtesy than Whites and other non-Blacks while in a store, restaurant, or other business establishment.
10. You were passed over for an important project although you were more qualified and competent than the White/non-Black person given the task.

## EQUALITY AND JUSTICE: IMPLICATIONS FOR WELL-BEING AND SUCCESS

11. Whites/ non-Blacks have stared at you as if you didn't belong in the same place with them; whether it was a restaurant, theater, or other place of business.
12. You have observed the police treat White/non-Blacks with more respect and dignity than they do Blacks.
13. You have been subjected to racist jokes by Whites/non-Blacks in positions of authority and you did not protest for fear they might have held it against you.
14. While shopping at a store, or when attempting to make a purchase, you were ignored as if you were not a serious customer or didn't have any money.
15. You have observed situations where other Blacks were treated harshly or unfairly by Whites/non-Blacks due to their race.
16. You have heard reports of White people/non-Blacks who have committed crimes, and in an effort to cover up their deeds falsely reported that a Black man was responsible for the crime.
17. You notice that the media plays up those stories that cast Blacks in negative ways (child abusers, rapists, muggers, etc.), usually accompanied by a large picture of a Black person looking angry or disturbed.
18. You have heard racist remarks or comments about Black people spoken with impunity by White public officials or other influential White people
19. You have been given more work, or the most undesirable jobs at your place of employment while the White/non-Black of equal or less seniority and credentials is given less work, and more desirable tasks.
20. You have heard or seen other Black people express a desire to be White or to have White physical characteristics because they disliked being Black or thought it was ugly.

21. White people or other non-Blacks have treated you as if you were unintelligent and needed things explained to you slowly or numerous times.
22. You were refused an apartment or other housing; you suspect it was because you're Black.

## **Appendix E**

### **Scale 5 Enriched Life Scale**

Likert Scale 1-5, 1 being strongly disagree, 5 being strongly agree.

1. I have people in my life whom I can turn to for emotional support.
2. I have lasting, positive relationships
3. I have people in my life whom I trust.
4. I have people in my life that are not my relatives but feel like family.
5. I have close, best-friend types of relationships.
6. I have people in my life whom I can turn to for information.
7. I feel loved.
8. I have people in my life whom I can turn to for resources (such as financial resources, help with child care, transportation, employment, etc.)
9. I have people in my life who inspire me.
10. feel a sense of accountability to others.
11. feel close to another person because of a hardship we have shared together.
12. I have a sense of direction in my life
13. I have purpose in my life.
14. I have personal goals that I am working on achieving.



## EQUALITY AND JUSTICE: IMPLICATIONS FOR WELL-BEING AND SUCCESS

15. I am optimistic and hopeful about the future.
16. I am proud of myself.
17. I approach life with excitement and energy
18. I feel part of something bigger than myself.
19. I am working toward a common goal with other people.
20. My role in my family, work, or community is a positive source of self-worth and  
connection to others
21. I am grateful for people or opportunities in my life.
22. I am kind and understanding toward myself when I am going through a hard time.
23. I am open minded to trying new experiences.
24. I feel like a leader in my community.
25. I participate in community service activities that increase my sense of purpose.
26. I participate in leadership activities that increase my sense of purpose
27. I feel connected to my local community.
28. I feel a sense of belonging to a larger community
29. I put time and effort into helping others.
30. Even when I feel nervous, anxious, or irritable, I am able to carry out day-to-day  
activities and responsibilities in my work and relationships
31. Even when I feel down, depressed, or low energy, I am able to carry out day-to-day  
activities and responsibilities in my work and relationships.
32. I am able to focus, make decisions, and remember things.
33. When I get angry, I can stay in control of my words and my actions.
34. My mental health is excellent.

## **Appendix F**

### **Scale 6**

#### **Perceptions of Legal Equality Index**

Likert scale from 1-5. 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

1. The American Judicial System treats everyone fairly regardless of race or ethnic background.
2. The Law is enforced through judges or police officers fairly, regardless of their race or ethnic background.
3. I believe the laws in place in the United States protect the rights of all, regardless of their race or ethnic background.
4. I believe the laws in place in the United States do not need to undergo any changes or additions.
5. I believe everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity or gender, is offered the same opportunity in the United States through legislation (i.e. Civil Rights Act, Bill of Rights, etc.).